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ABSTRACT

This bibliographic essay includes books and periodicals covering the historical, cultural, literary, musical, sculptural, religious, culinary, and educational aspects of the Czech experience. Special attention is focused on the role of Czechoslovakians in Texas, and the United States. Items range from cookbooks and language primers, to biographies, to the more scholarly histories. Most of the items included are in English; a few in Czech. Full bibliographic information including price and availability, is provided for each of the 46 items mentioned in the essay. (JLB)

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CZECH CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE AMERICAN CULTURE

by

Leroy F. Psencik

America, the great melting pot, in recent years has started to realize that the elements of her smelter are perhaps as different as they are similar. The nation that has historically opened her arms to all citizens of the world sees them first as Americans. But the diversity of their backgrounds and cultures, she now recognizes, is as vital to the life and history of the country as is their oneness.

One of the many groups of Americans turning to a new emphasis on their culture and heritage is the Czech American population in Texas and other parts of the United States. Czech culture and language are being taught to more people, using more modern approaches than ever before. Varied courses in many school systems are being revised to cover the Czech culture and heritage more comprehensively, and new content is being introduced. Interest in initiating the Czech language in the schools also is gaining support.

Contributions of the Czechs as well as other groups should be taught at every appropriate occasion, in the homes, schools, and churches, but with care that such instruction does not further separate the groups from their contexts in the entire American culture. Teaching that ignores these opportunities deprives the Czech American of his heritage, culture,

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and heroes just as it deprives the Anglo American of knowledge about, and understanding of, the Czech American and his past. Czech history, along with the histories of other members of the American community, requires inclusion in the story of the State and Nation--if that story is to be more than fiction. Instruction in the homes, schools, and churches must rectify such fictionalized accounts in re-ordering the study of the Czechs and their past.

Since most Czech Americans today were themselves trained from text-books which largely failed to recognize the contributions of the Czechs, effective integration of Czech history may require a new orientation for everyone concerned. Almost a prerequisite to this is an ingrained quality which we can only hope that everyone concerned will possess--a kind of dedication to humanity itself, which includes a sense of fairness in representing fully and factually the role of the Czechs in Texas, the United States, and the contemporary world society. Everyone, then, needs a certain sensitivity to the indigenous merits of the Czechs and their contribution to the American culture--not simply as a parallel to the development of the people, the places, and the ideas known as American, but as an integral and interacting part of this development. Thus the Czech American will do well to read widely about the roles and contributions of his ancestors so that he may develop an intellectual reservoir of knowledge upon which to draw when informing others about the Czechs.

Certain books may help make the Czech American acutely aware of the Czech contributions to the American culture. The books cover historical, cultural, literary, musical, sculptural, religious, culinary, and educational attributes. It would be exceedingly commendable if every home, school, and church library had one or more of the books from each of the classifications. Individuals may consult their local book stores for copies or order directly from the sources. Complete information on all publications mentioned, including the cost and source, is given at the end of this article.

Historical books about the Czechs in Texas and in the United States are limited in number, especially those written in the English language. One of the major works relative to the Czechs in Texas is the book entitled The Czech Pioneers of the Southwest by Estelle Hudson and Henry R. Maresh. The book, published in 1934, provides a well-written and fascinating story of the importance and contributions of the Czech settlers in the history of Texas. Several chapters in the volume are given to the men, women, and families who have contributed and are still contributing to the civilization of Texas. An interesting family history for Texans is the book John Kohut and His Son Josef by R. W. Červenka. The book describes the trials and tribulations of an early Czech pioneer family in Texas--typical of the other stalwart Texans that came from Czechoslovakia. A community study of the Czechs may be found in A History of West, Texas, 1836-1920 by Henry M. Apperson. Unfortunately,

too few family and community books about the Czechs in Texas exist. For a broader history of the Czechs in the United States, one should read Thomas Čapek's book entitled The Čechs (Bohemians) in America. The book, first published in 1920, is now available in a reprint edition. The volume gives an excellent account of the national, cultural, political, social, economic, and religious contributions of the Czechs in the United States. However, contributions of the Slovaks are not included in the volume.

Another informative book titled Czech Contributions to the Growth of the United States by František Dvorník was published in 1961. Dvorník presents a study of the Czech immigration and the resulting contributions to the growth and cultural expansion of their new Fatherland (the U. S.). The book also contains some information about the Czechs in Texas.

Still another recent publication is The Czechs and Slovaks in America by Joseph S. Roucek, which gives a brief account of Czechs and Slovaks in the United States. The book, especially appealing to the young reader, is interesting and will make any Czech American proud of the contributions of his ancestors to the diversity of the American culture.

America: Glorious and Chaotic Land is the title of yet another book about America written by Charles Sealsfield (alias Karel Postel). The author presents his travels and experiences as an early immigrant throughout the United States, including Texas, in an interesting narrative that gives the reader an intimate knowledge of the early history of the United States from the viewpoint of a Czech writer. Two books written

in Czech also may be of particular interest to Czech Americans in Texas. The book entitled Naše Dějiny (Our History) was published in 1939. Printed only in Czech, it provides a wealth of information about the Czech Catholic people and communities in Texas. For the Czech Americans who moved to Texas from Nebraska, the book Dějiny Čechů v Nebrasce (History of the Czechs in Nebraska) by Růžena Rosická will be of particular interest. The book, also printed in Czech, was published in 1928 and presents a historical perspective into the many Czech communities in Nebraska.

Czech cultural contributions to the world, including the United States, are presented in a rather voluminous, but interesting volume, entitled The Czechoslovak Contribution to World Culture edited by Miloslav Rechcigl, Jr. The book contains an interesting article on "The Czechs in Texas" written by John M. Skřivánek of Texas A and M University. Two previously mentioned historical works, The Čechs (Bohemians) in America and Czech Contributions to the Growth of the United States, also contain chapters on Czech cultural contributions in the United States. Two excellent culturally-oriented books have been published recently for the young reader. One of the books is Children in Czechoslovakia by Marcela Andrlova. With the aid of 150 photographs, the author, a Czech herself, draws from her personal experience to provide an absorbing, detailed account of the games and holidays, food and folklore, studies and sports, health care, and duties that make up the life of a Czechoslovakian child. The book provides a unique look at the generation that will shape the

future of Czechoslovakia and should prove to be most interesting to any Czech American, young or old. A similar book is Czechoslovakia in Pictures by Alan Richman. The author of the book points out that Czechoslovakia, in spite of its turbulent history, has developed a rich culture and a mighty industrial capacity. In this book the reader will see, with the aid of more than 100 fascinating photographs, how the Czechs and Slovaks live and work in a land of humming factories, neat farms, soaring Gothic cathedrals, elegant Baroque palaces, and splendid mountains and forests. The book provides compact coverage of all aspects of Czechoslovakia, for student and tourist, as well as for the average reader who wants to learn more about a nation that is much in today's news.

In the area of literature, an interesting book for the adult reader is Czech and Slovak Stories, which contains an excellent collection of twenty stories selected and translated by Jeannie W. Němcová. The stories in the book have been chosen to convey the development of Czech and Slovak literature in the past century, and to show the emergence of a distinct national identity. Another interesting book is Petr Bezruč's Silesian Songs. The book contains a wide selection of translated poems written about the region from which many of the ancestors of Czech Americans in Texas came. The young reader will find the book Favorite Fairy Tales Told in Czechoslovakia by Virginia Haviland extremely enjoyable. It contains five fairy tales chosen as typical

ones told to Czechoslovakian children. Illustrations in the book have admirably captured the spirit of the tales and the flavor of the Czech background. Other English translations of Czech and Slovak literature are increasingly being made available to the Czech American reader in the United States.

Many impressions about the Czechs have been transferred to the United States through the vehicle of music, and Czech Americans should inform themselves about the many Czech contributions to music. A recent book by John Rublowsky entitled Music in America discusses the musical heritage of the United States. The author stresses the influence of the early Moravian settlers on the religious and secular songs of America as well as the American influence on the music of Antonín Dvořák. Here is the full story of American music, including the Czech influences, in an interesting, easy-to-read volume. Two biographic books of interest to the young as well as the adult reader are Antonín Dvořák: Composer From Bohemia by Claire Lee Purdy and Mozart: Music Magician by Claire Huchet Bishop. Purdy has written a fascinating and vital biography of Antonín Dvořák from his peasant boyhood in Bohemia to his place of great renown as one of the world's most gifted composers. Wolfgang Mozart, the Austrian-born musical genius who spent his happiest days in Prague, comes alive in the genuinely warm and moving biography by Bishop. More advanced reading about the same two composers may

be found in Mozart The Dramatist: A New View of Mozart, His Operas, and His Age by Brigid Brophy and Dvořák: His Life and Times by Gervase Hughes.

The sculptural arts may best be examplified by the works of Albin Polášek, who came to the United States in 1901 from his birthplace, Frenstat, Moravia, in Czechoslovakia. Through study, hard work, thrift and perseverance, he became a world renouned sculptor. Because of the many requests for additional information about Polášek's works, his wife, Emily Polášek, assembled a most informative, illustrative book of accounts and photographs of his works entitled Albin Polášek: Man Carving His Own Destiny.

Czech immigrants contributed significantly to the religious cause in Texas and the United States. Contributions were made by Czech Catholics as well as Czech Protestants. An interesting book entitled Czech-American Catholics, 1850-1920 was written by Joseph Cada to provide a source dealing with the founding of the Catholic church in the numerous Czech communities in the United States. The brief history is intended as reading for the general public as well as a source of information about the religious activities of the Czech Catholic immigrants. A more specific volume on the Czech Catholics in Texas, Naše Dějiny, has been previously mentioned in the historical works. The Czech Protestant movement in the United States originated in 1735 when a small group of Moravians arrived in the Georgia colony to preach the gospel to the American Indians.

For a definitive history of the Moravian Church, one should read the History of the Moravian Church by J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton. The revised edition is comprehensive, objective, and eminently readable; it is certainly a valuable reference for one interested in the most complete history of the Moravian Church, including its activities in the United States. Another reference on the Moravian Church is Through Five Hundred Years: A Popular History of the Moravian Church by Allen W. Schattschneider, a book that should be especially appealing to the young reader. Early Czech Protestants moving to Texas started their own religious denomination when settlers in a small community known as Veselí, now Wesley, in Washington County, officially organized the Wesley Brethren Church in 1864. The church became a member of the Union of the Bohemian-Moravian Brethren when it was organized in Texas in 1903. Today the religious denomination is known as The Unity of the Brethren. Members of this religious denomination as well as other Czech Americans in Texas will want to read a recently published book entitled Unity of the Brethren in Texas (1855-1966). The historically-oriented book, compiled by a study committee of the Christian Sisters Union, gives a vivid description of the struggles encountered by the early Czech Protestant pioneers in establishing themselves as a religious denomination in Texas.

A true picture of the Czechs would not be presented if one failed to mention the culinary specialties of Czech cookery. The book entitled

Foods and Festivals of the Danube Lands by Lila Perl devotes a section to Czech and Slovak folklore and recipes to share with Czech Americans, who have the good fortune to enjoy the culinary heritage of Czechoslovakia and other Danube lands. Another interesting book is Memorial Book and Recipes compiled by Mary Baca, a Czech immigrant to Texas, in order to raise funds for the Czech Catholic Home for the Aged. The book contains not only a wealth of Czech recipes, but also much information about and many photographs of early Czech pioneer families in Texas. Still another book of Czech recipes is Bohemian-American Cook Book by Marie Rosická. The book, also available in a Czech edition entitled Česko-Americká Kuchařka, contains recipes translated directly from the original "Czech Cook Book" first published in the United States in 1909. Finally, the Czech National Cook Book by M. L. Jandáček, also available in a Czech edition entitled Česká Národní Kuchařka, is another fine source of Czech recipes.

Numerous books also are available to the Czech American who is interested in studying the Czech language. For those who do not have access to a teacher of the Czech language, the books Teach Yourself Czech by W. R. and Z. Lee and Czech Language Lessons by Ernest J. Žižka as well as the lessons that appear periodically in the Věstník will provide valuable assistance. For those who have some knowledge of the Czech language or have access to a teacher of the Czech language, the books Progressive Czech by Bohumil E. Mikula, A Modern Czech Grammar by William E. Harkins, and Modern Conversational Czech (including

taped lessons) by John M. Skřivánek will be of valuable assistance. An advanced book on the historical development of Slavonic linguistics is Stuart E. Mann's book entitled Czech Historical Grammar. The book describes how the Old Czech language, with its Indo-European background and its connections in Latin and Greek, affords a useful introduction to Slavonic linguistics.

Students of the Czech language will not progress very far without the aid of a good Czech-English and English-Czech dictionary. Several good ones are available, including: Anglicko Český Slovník (English-Czech Dictionary) by Jan Caha and Jiří Krámský; English-Czech Czech-English Dictionary by Alois Čermák; Česko-Anglický Slovník (Czech-English Dictionary) by Ivan Poldauf; Anglicko-Česky a Česko-Anglický Kapesní Slovník (English-Czech and Czech-English Pocket Dictionary) by Karel Hais; and Anglicko-Český Slovník (English-Czech Dictionary) by Antonín Osička and Ivan Poldauf.

Czech language students may also wish to subscribe to one or more of the several Czech newspapers and periodicals published in Texas, such as Bratrské Listy, Hospodář, Našinec, [redacted] and Věstník. Actually, any Czech American who can read the Czech language should subscribe to one or more of these publications simply to practice his reading skills and help perpetuate the existence of the Czech newspapers and periodicals. It is a tribute to the Czechs in Texas to have so many publications still in print. What a loss it would be if circulation were allowed to cease for lack of support by Czech Americans living in Texas.

Although only selected volumes about the Czechs are listed here, perhaps these will guide the Czech American to choose with some discrimination from among the publicat.ons now available about the roles and contributions of the Czechs to the American culture. For the reader who is interested in the culture and heritage of Czechoslovakia, he may order books, records, slides, photographs, etc. directly from ARTIA (ve Smečkách 30, Praha 1, Czechoslovakia). With adequate reading materials and a good knowledge of his background, a concerned Czech American can contribute greatly to making all Americans better informed about the Czech culture and history, and will encourage them to be citizens who are willing to use such knowledge with sensitivity and to work together in more constructive ways to improve this State and Nation.

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